

Only This by Val_Creative

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Summary:

Missing scenes for 2x09. Eleven and Mike and their relationship through Hopper's eyes.

Only This

Author's Note:

Okay but as much as I loved how we went right to Jane Hopper #confirmed and the Snowball during this episode, I always wondered about El and Hopper leaving the lab and El and Mike reuniting a second time that night? So I wrote it lmao. Just some mini scenes. Hope you liked them! Thoughts/comments so appreciated! <3

[sapphic-spook](#) and [bekasyura](#) listened to me and encouraged this so all my thanks!

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All at once, there's silence and *noise* blaring in Hopper's ears.

The cavernous echoes filtering in, the thuds of dead, heavy demodogs slamming into the ground far below them. The creaking of their suspension platform.

Everything darkens as soon as the mystical red light of the Gate vanishes, and Hopper abandons his rifle, opening his arms and catching a floating, half-conscious El. The pull of gravity brings them up to their knees. He shushes her mindfully, as El trembles and sobs in heaving, soundless gasps against his chest.

Has anyone ever been this exhausted physically and mentally before? Has she been held like this by someone else — feeling safe and secure and without fear? Hopper doesn't imagine so.

She had been a weapon, a tool for Brenner and his people. Not even given a *real* name.

Despite what he's witnessed from her, all of that raw and savage power and what it's capable of, Hopper only sees a terrified little girl, who loves hand-holding and fuzzy teddy bears and her Momma, and

who just wants a *home*.

"Hey, hey, kid," he murmurs, easing them into a sit and finding she's unable to on her own. "Deep breathes with me, okay? In, and out..." Hopper doesn't trust her legs to hold her weight, so he lifts her up with one arm cradling under her, jamming the button for the platform to lower. "In, out, that's good... good..."

*

The night air feels sharp and bitter-cold on his cheeks.

(But it's so much better than being trapped in that *hellhole* of a laboratory for another moment longer.)

El doesn't shift or fight out of his grasp, only crying weakly into Hopper's jacket-shoulder.

He doesn't have the words to reassure or console her. Hopper is barely sure what the hell just *happened* back there — except that they won. Because of her. Because El was stronger than the monster.

"We're gonna get you outta here, it's all over now," Hopper tells her, carrying her across the parking lot. He pops open the passenger seat's door and maneuvers her inside comfortably, buckling her seat-belt for her.

An unopened, cold water bottle lies on the floor under El's seat. He pulls it free, uncapping it.

"You feeling dizzy?"

El doesn't respond at first, and then she nods faintly.

"Okay," Hopper says, unlacing her bandanna and frowning at the copious amount of blood under her nostrils. "I want you to drink the whole thing up, got it? But take it slow. You got plenty of time on the ride back."

He lets her get in a few, tentative sips, before pouring some of the water onto El's bandanna. It's *too* cold, and it's *too* dark to see properly, and Hopper's hands are bumbling and visibly shaking, as he

attempts to wipe her face clean of the blood. El makes a low, startled noise, jerking away before allowing him to help her.

It doesn't feel like enough. But he's trying.

(Isn't that what parenting is supposed to feel like?)

*

A couple of minutes into the drive, Hopper feels her hand slip into his, clasp on as hard as she can.

Proud doesn't begin to explain how he feels.

*

There's an additional car in the Byers driveway.

Hopper narrows his eyes, but keeps speeding forward.

A shadowy figure runs into their direction, leaping off the front porch. He recognizes Mike immediately, flush-faced and swimming goggles in his dark curls and losing a scarf once draped around his neck to the wind.

El's face is still puffy and bright red, from all of her tears and physical exertion. Hopper barely gets to slow the truck down in the road before she throws open the passenger side's door, fully intending on getting to Mike. El's legs keep her steady long enough to reach him, when Mike collides into her, sobbing loudly into her neck.

They sink onto the gravel-dusted road together, hugging so fiercely it aches, quivering and whimpering.

Hopper isn't sure if he feels concern or relief, staring at them while hanging out of the car-door. But he doesn't mean to go up and interrupt — he's gonna keep his distance. They need it, and each other.

None of the other kids or Steve Harrington approach either, lingering by the entrance-way or porch steps.

"I knew you could do it," Mike whispers, touching El's face. *"I saw it happen when the lights were glowing..."*

El looks over him, in a drowsy, lucid admiration, before she slowly faints. Hopper comes forward, as the younger man grabs onto El and adjusts her, hauling her lifeless, limp body into his arms.

"I've got her," Mike announces to him, seemingly calm.

Hopper places two fingers underneath El's chin.

"... yeah, her pulse is good and steady. Think she's just conked out," he says gruffly, leading by touching Mike's shoulder briefly. "Let's get her inside, Mike—it's *goddamn* freezing out here."

*

Hopper orders for everyone to settle down, as a chorus of voices and questions bombard him.

"She closed the gate and it—yes, I'm sure, I saw it—what, no, *no*, nobody needs to go back there—!"

While the rest of them chatter on and jump and embrace, Steve Harrington yelling over them, Hopper pokes his head into Joyce's bedroom. El lays out on the patterned, floral quilt, both eyes serenely shut.

"You should get yourself cleaned up," he says, glancing over Mike by her side. There's clumps of dirt and a sticky-gleaming, translucent goop all over Mike's jeans and on his navy blue, loose zip-up. It reeks like fresh *sewage*. "Maybe a change of clothes from Will's room, or something for the—"

Mike's hand tightens against El's fingers.

"I'm not leaving her," he answers, quiet and determined, never looking away from her.

Hopper feels his mouth twitch into a little, amused smile. "Suit yourself, kid." He turns away from the doorway, adding sternly, "As soon as she wakes up... you let me know, alright?"

"Alright," Mike echoes, folding an arm on the edge of the mattress and setting his cheek on it.

El and this kid gonna be *impossible* when they're grown, Hopper reminds himself, sighing.

Nobody would have it any other way.

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